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PRESS RELEASE

TAJIK BANK LOAN OFFICERS RETURN FROM UNITED STATES WITH NEW IDEAS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TAJIK BANKING SECTOR

Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Ten bank loan officers from Tajikistan returned on October 6, 2008, from three-week internships in the State of West Virginia in the United States. Participants of the USAID-sponsored Community Connections Loan Management program lived with American families, met with U.S. banking professionals, and exchanged ideas on various banking and credit issues.

Participants visited various financial institutions involved in lending activities in Bluefield and Charleston, West Virginia, as well as in Washington D.C. In addition, the three day trip to Washington D.C. allowed participants to see the major banks and financial institutions of the U.S. capital. Participants also had a chance to meet with clients of lending institutions. For example, they enjoyed site visits to private sector businesses, including a tractor supply company and a Christmas tree farm, in order to talk to clients of the banks and learn from the client's different perspectives. The training component of the program allowed participants to gain new knowledge, skills, and ideas which they will utilize in their practical work with various commercial banks in Tajikistan.

The participants also appreciated the cultural aspects of the program, in particular their home stays with American host families. Participants found the cultural enrichment component of the program particularly rewarding, and enjoyed the hospitality of their American host families immensely.

Several participants attended an American football game. On weekends, the group engaged in typical American pastimes, like visiting museums, playing sports in city parks, and enjoying the last of summer in outdoor picnics. The not-so-typical events included helicopter rides. The participants shared their history, culture, and traditions with their American host families and friends. This helped many Americans better understand Tajikistan and its people.

The USAID Community Connections Program provides an important opportunity for citizens of the United States and Tajikistan to work together to address common professional challenges while expanding their social and cultural understanding. As business and professional communities of both countries become more integrated, opportunities for positive relations between the American people and the people of Tajikistan are increasingly important. The USAID Community Connections Program offers community-based, three-to-five week practical trainings in the United States for business and professional organization leaders from Tajikistan.

The Community Connections Program is one of the many assistance projects implemented in Tajikistan by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on behalf of the American people. Since 1993 the American people through USAID have provided about \$300 million in assistance programs that support economic growth, democratic institutions, health care, and education systems of Tajikistan.

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